

Your Town and Native Americans

Purpose: To provide a better understanding of difficult local histories of Native Americans, specifically during the boarding school era at the end of the 1800s through the various movements of the 1900s. This history is often passed over in favor of more distant histories of Native Americans, a tendency related to relieving settler guilt.

Recommended Resources:

- Recommended reading:
 - Antoine, Asma-na-hi, Rachel Mason, Roberta Mason and Sophia Palahicky. [“Pulling Together: A Guide for Curriculum Developers.”](#) (2018).
 - Reese, Debbie. [“Proceed with Caution: Using Native American Folktales in the Classroom.”](#) *Language Arts* 84, no. 3 (January 2007): 245–56.
 - Sarah B. Shear, Ryan T. Knowles, Gregory J. Soden & Antonio J. Castro (2015) *Manifesting Destiny: Re/presentations of Indigenous Peoples in K–12 U.S. History Standards, Theory & Research in Social Education*, 43:1, 68-101, DOI: [10.1080/00933104.2014.999849](https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2014.999849)
- Internet access

Steps:

- Have everyone share what they already know about Native history of their region, as well as what they are learning about late 19th and 20th century local Native history.
- Have students look up the history of their town and its relation to Native Americans. Focus specifically on the nineteenth century to the present.
 - Compile a list of keywords for local history.
 - Note nearby counties with large Native populations, boarding schools that were in or near your town, or specific bands or tribes that are or have been based in your town.
- Next, focus on the later half of the 20th century. Students can look up prominent local Native leaders, the American Indian Movement (AIM), the Sixties Scoop and other adoption policies, local protests by Native people, and topics related to your local community.
- Return to group discussion:
 - Who was familiar with these local histories before researching today?
 - When and where do we learn about local histories? Which histories are told?
 - How do these local and tribal histories affect your views about Native Americans or how history is taught?

- Note: Much of this history can be emotional, explain to students that feeling these emotions is okay, and must be processed. The trauma caused by this history still affects Native communities. Difficult subjects shouldn't be hidden from your class—issues facing Native peoples are critical to understand, and dealing with this knowledge and the emotions that accompany it can empower students.
- If there are Native students in your class *who want to*, provide a space to speak about their own communities, experiences, or perspectives. Check in with Native students to see how they are doing with this research.

Ideas for response/essay questions following this research:

- After doing your research on 20th century Native Americans in your community, has your viewpoint changed?
- "Did you know much about about the history of local Native Americans in the 1900s before this project? Might it be beneficial for schools to teach this history?"
- Of what you learned, what impacted you most? Why? How does this change your understanding of your town?

Examples of some possible topics from South Eastern Michigan

- Many bands and tribes, such as the Prairie Band Potawatomi, were removed from SE Michigan in the early 1800s. Students could possibly look into where those tribes ended up and how their connections to the Great Lakes area impacted them during the 20th century and continues to impact them today despite residing in other parts of the country.
- The Treaty of Fort Meigs in 1817 led to the creation of the University of Michigan. Students could look into how that treaty has been honored and dishonored in the 20th and 21st centuries.
 - Land Acknowledgements made by the university.
 - The history of the Native American Student Association at UM, as well as the beginning of the Ann Arbor Dance For Mother Earth Powwow.
 - The history of Michiguama, and the Occupation of the Bell Tower of the Union in 2000 by the Students of Color Coalition to protest this and other secret societies on campus.
 - The continued extremely low enrollment of Native American students at the University of Michigan, found on the demographics page of the Student Admissions website for UM.
 - The history of NAGPRA and its impact at the University of Michigan, and other local museums.
 - The American Indian Movement and its influence in Ann Arbor.
- The service of many Native Americans in WWI, despite Native Americans not having a birth right to American citizenship until 1924. Many of these soldiers were influenced to join the armed forces in order to be given citizenship for serving.
 - The U.S. World War One Centennial Commission website has a database of American Indian soldier, with many coming from Michigan, and specifically from Detroit and other Lower Peninsula towns.
- The recent shift from ‘Columbus Day’ to ‘Indigenous Peoples’ Day’ in Ann Arbor, and the recent history behind that shift, or the Central or Eastern Michigan Mascot debate.
- The history of tribal recognition by the federal government, such as the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe or Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi.
- Indian Boarding schools located in Southern/ South Western Michigan, such as Griswold, Ottawa Colony, Old Wing, and Pokagon.
- Other options include seeing how national laws or customs effects Native people on a communal scale, such as census taking, the Dawes Act (1887), the Indian Reorganization Act (1934), Indian Relocation Act (1956), the Termination Policy (1953), and other federal laws.
- Other resources can be found at Native-run websites such as Turtle Talk (<https://turtletalk.blog/category/michigan-indian/>) that tie the extremely recent to the recent past of the experiences of Native Americans in the state of Michigan.

This lesson plan accompanies the online exhibit [*No, not even for a picture*](#): *Re-examining the Native Midwest and Tribes’ Relationships to the History of Photography*.

